Main Findings and Policy
Implications from the Research Project
Public Perceptions of Mountain Forests in Switzerland

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Abstract
The research project was carried out in order to obtain more knowledge of the attitudes of people living in the mountain areas of Switzerland towards forests, forestry and forest politics. A questionnaire was sent to 2160 private individuals and 72 communal councillors responsible for the forest in their own communes. It contained both questions which the respondents were asked to answer in their own words, and questions, for which they were asked to select from a number of pre-set options. Answers were returned by well over 600 members of the general public and some 60 councillors, thus providing a basis for evaluation. The questionnaire was sent to 6 communes in each of 6 different cantons in the Alps, Pre-Alps and the Jura.

The paper presents selected findings of the final research project report which, in the option of the authors, confirm some of the assumptions but also provide new and unexpected insights. This refers in particular to the concepts and knowledge of the respondents; their associations with the term of forests; their judgements on the distribution of forest areas and on the state of forests; their views on the role and activities of forest owners; their reactions to current practices of protecting forests and of funding forestry; and to the opinions of communal council representatives in forestry matters.

Keywords: Forest Policy; Perceptions and Attitudes; Empirical Survey; Swiss Mountain Areas; Forest Research.

1 Scope of the Project
The Swiss study, elaborated within the frame of COST-Action E3, aimed at obtaining new and deeper knowledge of the attitude of people dwelling in the mountain areas of Switzerland towards forest itself, forestry as such, and forest politics. A written questionnaire was sent to 2160 private individuals and 72 communal councillors responsible for the forest in their own communes. It contained both "free" questions, i.e., questions which the respondents were asked to answer in their own words, and "restricted" questions, for which they were asked to select from a number of pre-set options. Answers were returned by well over 600 members of the general public and some 60 councillors, thus providing a basis for evaluation. The questionnaire was sent to 6 communes in each of 6 different cantons in the Alps, Pre-Alps and the Jura. Readers are asked to bear in mind that the results and conclusions discussed in this summary refer solely to the population of the alpine regions included in the study. That the survey was restricted to the mountain population was mainly due to its integration in an international research programme (COST) aimed at investigating...
questions regarding the future development of rural areas in Europe. Further, the study area, the number and selection of those polled, and the methods employed were to a large extent limited by available funding. Despite these institutional and financial limitations, the investigation furnished information confirming existing assumptions and experiences, brought to light some surprising points of view, gave rise to questions for further investigations and provide a basis for comparison with similar representative studies. In the following, the authors present some of the - in their opinion - most important findings.

The data were processed with SAS 6.10 computer software and evaluated. The descriptive SAS analyses were made in the second half of 1995 and summarised in a first intermediate report, partially published in the EFI Proceedings No. 15, 1996. The final report for the project has been delivered to the initiator in July 1998 and will be published. For the sake of brevity in the following sections, the three levels of the political community, the federal government, the governments of the cantons, and the councils of the communes are often referred to simply as the confederation, the cantons and the communes.

2 The population has not only clear ideas about forests but also some knowledge on land ownership and on the prime agents determining forest policies

From the start one of the prominent findings was that most of the respondents felt competent to answer challenging and discriminating questions concerning the forest and forestry. To almost all of the questions, very few answered "Don't know". This empirically demonstrable fact is surprising, because the list of questions, especially those concerning forest and forestry, included issues which receive relatively little attention in the media and with which members of the general public are seldom confronted. On the other hand, they evidently have a personal relationship with forests: these are close at hand, entrance is unrestricted and free of charge, and they frequently spend time there. This may well have created a feeling of intimacy with forest issues, which in turn facilitated their answering the questions.

The questionnaire contained questions concerning not only attitudes but also knowledge about particular aspects. Obviously, the interpretation of written replies to questions received through the post needs to be approached with caution. First, it must be assumed that people interested in the topic and consequently possessing above-average knowledge are over-represented. Secondly, it is probable that at least some of the respondents looked up relevant information before answering. Despite these reservations, the answers returned clearly show that the majority of the population is relatively well-informed about the three fields of forest, forestry and forest politics.

This finding is particularly evident with regard to rough estimates of the distribution of forest ownership. To the restricted question as to whom the forests in Switzerland belong to, the estimates given were:

publicly owned: 79%
privately owned: 21%.

According to official statistics the corresponding figures are 73% and 27% respectively.\(^1\) The average estimates are close to the actual figures, which shows that the majority of the people know, or at least assume, that most of the forest in Switzerland is publicly owned. It would require a more detailed analysis to establish how far the situation in different cantons - for instance, in the canton of Bern nearly half of the forest is privately owned - is reflected in the distribution of the answers. This also applies to the finding that while, of the options given, 13% of the respondents selected 5% or less, only 6% chose over 40%, and 7% opted for 50% as the proportion of privately owned forest in Switzerland. Admittedly, such variations preclude the general conclusion "The public knows whom the forest belongs to", but nevertheless it can be said that the fact that most of the Swiss forest is publicly owned is generally known.

Less widespread and less precise are knowledge about or estimates of the different owner categories. Below, the estimates regarding the distribution of forest ownership are compared to the actual figures:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Owner category</th>
<th>estimated figure</th>
<th>actual figure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communes/corporations</td>
<td>50 %</td>
<td>67.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantons</td>
<td>16 %</td>
<td>4.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confederation</td>
<td>12 %</td>
<td>0.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private persons</td>
<td>21 %</td>
<td>27.0 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The estimates concerning the distribution of ownership between the different public entities partly diverge widely from the actual figures: considerably more forest is thought to belong to the cantons and very much more to the confederation than is really the case. This means that it is little known that the confederation itself owns only a small, the cantons only a modest proportion of the forests in Switzerland. On the other hand, a large majority (79%) of the respondents correctly assumed that most of the forest is owned by communes and corporations.

Knowledge about forest ownership was also one topic in a previous nation-wide survey, held in 1978\(^2\). Although many of the topics dealt with in this survey were also included in ours, caution is necessary in comparing the answers given because the first was nation-wide while the second was restricted to the alpine regions, and because the content, orientation and formulation of the questions were often different. As regards forest ownership, respondents to the 1978 survey were asked to estimate who the major part of the forests belongs to, by selecting options a) listing owner categories and b) ranking owners in order of precedence. The distribution of legal ownership had remained fairly constant for some time, and the estimates given were as follows:


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forest owners</th>
<th>classed as major owners</th>
<th>estimated by rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citizens’ communes / corporations</td>
<td>23 %</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political communes</td>
<td>26 %</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>4 %</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other private persons</td>
<td>2 %</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confederation and cantons</td>
<td>46 %</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The answers in the two surveys were surprisingly close. In our survey some 10% of the respondents ranked private persons as the major owners, that is, as possessing more of the forest than any single one of the three categories confederation, cantons and/or communes/corporations. Comparison of the estimates as to the distribution of ownership between the various public bodies is more difficult because our survey asked for the estimated percentage of forest owned, while that of 1978 for the estimated rank of the owners. It is, however, noticeable that in both surveys the proportion of ownership by the federal and cantonal governments was considerably overestimated. The scatter of this overestimation cannot be determined. The same applies to the classification of communes and corporations as forest owners: these two were listed separately in the 1978 survey, whereas in ours they were grouped into one category. However, an overall comparison of the two sets of findings indicates that the general public now knows more about who actually owns the forests than was the case twenty years ago. This deduction is mainly based on the finding that the unofficial rank of forest owners estimated in answer to our question approximates the actual figures, while the answers to the 1978 survey display more discrepancies in this respect.

The degree of knowledge and/or accuracy of estimates about the prime agents in determining forest policies was surprisingly high. According to Article 24 of the Federal Constitution, this is a joint responsibility of the federal and cantonal governments, who set the basic framework. Their broad-range decisions are supplemented by ordinances of the communal councils in their capacity as the major owners of the forests. The public are fully aware of and well-informed about this distribution of responsibility. Although the proportion of the power allocated to the three entities cannot be quantified, the estimates given in the survey replies - 27% confederation, 19% cantons, 18% communes - are probably very close to the reality. This is particularly true in that the majority of answers identified the confederation as the major actor in determining forest policy.

Another question regarding knowledge asked for estimates of the financial situation in forestry in Switzerland. Half of the respondents rated this as shaky, one quarter as middling, and only 5% as healthy. One sixth said they lacked the necessary knowledge to make any estimate. So, a predominant section of the public is pessimistic about the financial situation and a much smaller of the public has absolutely no idea about it. Here again, the general
impression matches the reality.\textsuperscript{3} Forest enterprises in Switzerland constantly showed losses from the end of the ’80s onwards, despite repeated increases in public funds, especially those from the federal government.

In summary it can be said that the general public possesses a certain amount of basic knowledge about forest ownership, forestry and forest politics. But precise knowledge is often lacking, so that in certain cases some individuals find it difficult or even impossible to estimate the actual situation.

\textbf{3 When it comes to forest, people first think of recreation and nature and only on closer questioning of protection}

A number of questions concerned the public’s assessment of the importance of what are known as 'forest functions' or 'benefits from the forest'. The overall picture obtained was to some extent, surprising, and also very clear. Two predominant features are the low number of people returning no answer and the high number of people acknowledging certain associations. In the responses to both restricted and free questions, "recreation" and "nature/landscape" were most strongly associated with "forest". This applied not only to their present but also their the future importance. Among terms spontaneously associated with the forest, "recreation" and "nature" topped the list by far. In answers to restricted questions on the importance of listed individual forest functions to the respondent personally, and their present and future importance, "landscape component", "recreational area", and "areas of nature" ranked - with one exception - markedly higher than other, particularly the economic functions. Further, "recreation" and "areas of nature" were the only functions whose future importance was rated as "on the uptrend" in more than 50% of the answers. All other functions of the forest were considered by the majority as likely to have the same importance in future as at present.

Questions about the functions and benefits of the forest also formed an important part of the 1978 survey. Even twenty years ago a similarly high proportion of respondents acknowledged a number of spontaneous associations with "forest", often the same ones (SASR, 1979, p. 6), and here too the recreational function was given priority. Although there was no detailed list or weighting, the value of forest to nature and landscape seems to have been less appreciated at that time than it is today. This is confirmed by the answers to restricted questions as to the value of the separate functions of forest. Purification of the air, recreation and leisure, and the various protective and regulatory functions (above all of water and the climate) were rated highest. The ecological and landscape functions, on the other hand, were considered rather less important. Here again, only guarded comparisons of the ’78 survey can be made. In the first, the question concerning air purification was restricted and placed at the top of the list of options, while our questionnaire gave no such hints. Air purification and oxygen production only appeared in the list of spontaneous associations, among which they came in fifth place.

\textsuperscript{3} According to the latest report of the Federal Office for Statistics/Federal Office of Environment, Forests and Landscape, Swiss Forest Agency, Yearbook 1996, p. 38ff
In our survey, questions as to the protective function of the mountain forests were posed both directly and indirectly and at different points. It is interesting to observe that of those terms spontaneously associated with "forest", only 24 people awarded "protection" first place, and only 58 acknowledged it at all. Among those functions given first priority it appeared in 7th place and among those mentioned at all as spontaneous associations it comes 8th. This ranking, and thus also the importance of protection as a function of the mountain forests, was different in the responses to restricted questions on the relative importance of various forest functions. When personal valuations were requested, protection was awarded about the same importance as diversity of landscape, recreation and nature. The same applies to the weighting given to the importance of all four of these functions within the region: in 90% of the answers, all of them were classed as "important" or "very important". They were also clearly ranked above other functions where respondents were asked to give their own personal weighting. As regards the importance of forest functions within the region, wood production appeared in addition to these four, and though not classed as "very important", was nevertheless rated "important".

Such a pattern of answers could be expected in response to a survey conducted in the Central Plateau or urban areas but not necessarily in a survey among people of alpine or rural areas. The findings indicate that there is possibly less difference between the people in the mountains and those of the Central Plateau or between urban and rural districts regarding awareness and evaluation of forest benefits as may be assumed.

4 We have neither too much nor too little forest

Among the samples of both members of the general public and communal councillors polled the predominant view is that the amount of forest in the region is suitable (90% and 75% respectively). Nevertheless, every fifth councillor considers that there is too much forest. Of the general public, 10% are dissatisfied and those favouring more forest or less are about equally represented. In each case, respondents most frequently based their assessments on the general appearance of the area, the immediate surroundings of their own abode, or simply gave their purely personal opinions.

Comparison of these responses with those to a similar question in the '78 survey (SASR 1979, p. 10ff) brings to light an interesting difference. Whereas in the '78 survey 37% of the respondents found that there was rather too little forest (63% enough, < 1% too little), in ours only 5% were of this opinion. The reasons for this massive decrease can only be mooted. One explanation may be that our question applied only to the respondent's own region, and this may have influenced the answers significantly. Since the mid-seventies the total area of forest in Switzerland has increased by some 100 000 ha\(^4\). Most of this increase has resulted from changes on agriculturally marginal land, which - apart from on the southern slopes of the Alps - is mostly to be found in the Alps and Pre-Alps, that is, in the regions our survey dealt with. A comparison with the views of people living in the Central Plateau would be interesting.

5 The state of the forests is satisfactory to good, but there are many and various dangers lurking

In the late '80s and early '90s - in connection with the debate on forest decline - by far the most frequent question put to foresters was about the state of health of the forests. Our survey included both one free and one restricted question each, first as to the state of the forests, and second as to the hazards threatening them. The assessments of the state of the forests ranged from doubtful to optimistic: the options "good/very good" and "satisfactory" were chosen more or less equally (about 44% in each case). Only around 1/9 of the respondents rated the condition of the forests as "poor" or even "very poor". Optimistic responses were most frequently based on impressions of good tending and proper maintenance. The answers given were often purely personal opinions.

The reasons given by those describing the condition of the forest as "satisfactory" were predominantly negative. This term is therefore to be understood as signifying "..but it would be better, if .." and not as "It's all right as it is". Those assessing the state of the forests as "poor" refer to "poor tending or poor maintenance", the "condition of the trees" and "natural hazards". Only rarely are human influences such as deposition of garbage, environmental pollution or exhaust fumes mentioned.

The answers to the free question about the dangers and threats to the forest were much more varied. The first striking feature is that more than 93% of the respondents named at least one source of danger. Of the divers threats named, three categories clearly came at the top of the list:

- natural hazards
- environmental pollution
- forestry

Among the natural hazards mentioned, wind and insects were by far the most predominant. Severe windthrows, above all those occurring in 1992, and the debate about bark beetles seem to have made a lasting impression on the picture people have of threats to the forests. The image produced by subsequent analysis and sub-categorising of the answers about 'environmental protection' is less sharp. Most of the respondents simply gave the general term environmental pollution as their answer; and though specific answers, which were in the minority, certainly target air pollution and exhaust fumes, there is no clear tendency to impute the blame to these factors. In general, the responses to this section of the questionnaire give the impression that there is considerable uncertainty and lack of awareness among the mountain people concerning the relationship between the state of the forest and environmental pollution. Here again, the political and scientific debates about forest decline may well have influenced public opinion in the mountains.

That the third major threat should be generally formulated as 'forestry', is at first sight surprising. Closer analysis, however, rapidly clarifies the case: more than 50% of the responses naming this as the major cause refer to insufficient tending/maintenance/exploitation. The respondents seem to regard forest tending as a major criterion, not only for assessing the state of the forest but also for estimating hazards to it.
This is also evident in the fact that only some 10% see inappropriate management or deforestation as detrimental. Finally, it is surprising that game and the exploitation of the forests for recreation and tourism are not, or only very seldom, considered as dangers or threats. Here is a marked difference between the judgements of professional foresters and the general public.

On the whole it is noticeable that in assessing the condition of the forests, the public do not primarily apply the state of health and degree of vitality as their yardstick - as professional foresters do - but the condition or general appearance; in other words, whether it looks tidy and well-kept. It was virtually only the minority taking a rather pessimistic view who actually used the term 'state of the forest' in its technical sense.

6 The forest owners should tend and regenerate the forest and be compensated for carrying out the demands of the public

Forest tending, here to be understood as silvicultural treatment, occupies a leading position in the responses to the restricted question as the importance of the activities of the forest owners. Apart from the installation and maintenance of leisure amenities, all the activities given as options were classed as important or very important. The population seems to regard forest tending and regeneration as most important of all, both for the present and the future. Repairing forest damage was regarded as equally important for the present but not for the future. The protection and conservation of the flora and fauna is expected to increase in importance in the future. Even for the present this activity was classed as important or very important in more than 90% of the answers. The care and conservation of game was also awarded high priority. Considerably less emphasis was laid on tasks such as harvesting and road construction and the dissemination of information to the public, although the majority still regarded these activities as important. Thus the public displays clear attitudes towards the activities of land owners, with those concerning remedial measures, nature and "tidying" in the foreground.

The 1978 survey contained questions regarding the tasks of owners respectively foresters too, though formulated as free questions on knowledge, so that a direct comparison is only partly permissible. The main duties were at that time considered to be general surveillance and "grooming" (mentioned in 30% of the answers, SASR 1979, p. 14ff.) Their second responsibility was defined as afforestation and tending of young growth (21%), and as less important tasks felling (17%), care and conservation of game (13%), pest control (10%), etc. Despite the limited comparability of these findings with those of our study, it can be seen that the picture of forest activities entertained by the public has changed considerably. It is especially noticeable that they have added the task of giving attention to silvicultural and nature conservation activities, and that they now regard actual forestry activities in the specific sense as less important than before.

It costs money to carry out the demands of the public. The survey shows that people entertain relatively clear ideas about who should bear these costs. In their opinion the expenses should be paid from public funds and by the forest proprietors. The fact that the majority of the respondents are aware that the major part of the forests belongs to public
authorities reinforces the strength of this conviction. Only an insignificant minority would like to see the political community relieved of this liability. On the other hand, only 11% considered that the forest owners should not bear any of the financial responsibility at all. As to the question of who should bear the major burden, opinions are divided. Our findings show that the predominant view is that this should be the federal government, but it is generally acknowledged that the financing of forestry activities should be a joint responsibility of the confederation, the cantons, the communes and the forest owners. This essentially matches the actual situation, in which funds are provided from mixed sources, with - especially in the alpine regions - the greater part deriving from the confederation.

It is fairly clear that the idea of forest devotees bearing part of the costs is generally rejected. More than 55% of the respondents considered that people using the forest for outdoor activities such as rambling, gathering mushrooms, sport, recreation etc. ought not bear any of the costs of tending and maintenance, though almost 30% thought it would be fair if such forest visitors were to pay a certain proportion of these costs. Here again, the clear majority of the public seems to be satisfied with the situation as it is. It may therefore be difficult to introduce basic changes or innovations, such as those proposed in the federal government's project VAFO, within a useful length of time. Nonetheless, a considerable proportion of the public (10% in our survey) has at present nothing against all who enjoy the benefits of the forest contributing towards the cost, and might be won over to this idea.

This evaluation on the whole matches findings so far on the knowledge, awareness and assessment of matters concerning forest. There seems to be some inconsistency with regard to recreation: on the one hand, this is considered as extremely important as a function, but on the other hand material installations for outdoor activities and information about the forest are only relatively little valued. These contrasting evaluations do not necessarily contradict each other. Rather, it is to be deduced that forest devotees are on the whole satisfied with its present condition and infrastructure, or in other words that the two major desiderata, recreation and community with nature, are adequately fulfilled.

7 On the difficulties of evaluating present forest policy

Under the rubric "basic forest politics", questions to establish three particular aspects of public opinion as to forest policy were posed. These concerned (1) the general degree of satisfaction with current forest policies, (2) the respective influence of the major actors and (3) the level of satisfaction with the latter’s activities.

The question "Are you satisfied with current forest policies?" posed insurmountable difficulties for many of the respondents. 37% answered that they did not know or simply gave no answer at all. In effect, this indicates that to a considerable proportion the population has no concrete idea of what the general term ‘forest policy’ means. This impression is reinforced by the answers to the subsequent free question "What do you particularly like or dislike about the current forest policy?". In both the positive and negative answers, concrete activities e.g., tending, regeneration, and general attitudes towards politics as a whole e.g., eradication of problems, responsibilities and participation predominated. In no case did as many as 10% express specific views on particular institutions and/or instruments. In general, in can be deduced that no clear picture on the degree of satisfaction with the authorities’
forest policy can be obtained solely from the answers to these questions. Equally, the finding that, of those who ventured any opinion at all, some 40% were satisfied, some 60% dissatisfied, must be interpreted with caution.

The situation regarding the evaluation of the main actors in forest politics is similar. Here again, a relatively high proportion (c. 20%) could not or would not give any opinion. It is noticeable that where the respondents were asked for their evaluation of the federal and cantonal governments, the forest owners, and forest societies, the number returning no answer at all was considerably higher than where they were asked to assess the communes and forest services. This pattern indicates that the public is little concerned with or actuated by forest politics at the higher levels. Consequently, it is understandable that almost all agents were assessed as fairly satisfactory. The highest level of satisfaction was accorded to the local forest services, the communes, and the nature and environmental protection organisations, the lowest to the forest owners and the federal government. On the whole, it appears that the highest degree of approval of all is awarded to the local forest services. The trend seems to be that the further removed the authority, the more critical the public.

8 There is a relatively high degree of acceptance of current practices of protecting forest areas and of public funding for forestry

The questions on general forest politics were supplemented by others on two instruments of the state in forest politics. First of all, the focus was on the one producing the most immediate and visible effects: the ban on the clearing of forest areas. The responses concerning the enforcement of this ban on deforestation displayed a similar pattern to those regarding general forest policy. Here too, the most noticeable feature is the large number of people replying "Don't know" when asked to evaluate the strictness with which the ban is enforced. Every fifth respondent felt unable to give any opinion. Of those who ventured an answer, the majority considered the existing practice satisfactory. About one fifth thought it too stringent, the same proportion too lenient. Despite the high proportion of "Don't know"s, it may be tentatively concluded that a) issues regarding deforestation are not of major importance to the public and b) the existing strict protection is - as far as can be seen - more or less accepted. This last can be substantiated with the argument that public opinion on this point clearly differs from that of the communal authorities. Incidentally, the pattern of responses here corresponds to that to the question of whether there is too much or too little forest in the region: the major features are the predominance of the answer "just right" for one thing, and for another the difference between the views of the general public and the officials of the communes.

Public financial transfers and compensations have become an important instrument in implementing forest policies, especially since the mid-'80s. They were therefore accorded appropriate weight in the survey, where five questions concerning their assessment were put. In the first question, the participants were asked for their opinion of the fact that the confederation, the cantons and the communes together annually award public financial means amounting to some 400 million Swiss Francs to forestry. In contrast to the preceding questions about forest policy, almost all of them felt qualified to express a view. The overwhelming majority were very liberal: 60% thought this level should be maintained, 30%
were even in favour of an increase. This indicates a high degree of acceptance of these transfers among the general public, which is echoed and even exceeded by their communal representatives, who approve yet more of the existing compensations and markedly more strongly (60%) advocate increases.

It is noticeable that the people by no means seek to have “their” communes exempted from financial obligations and “shunt off” the whole burden onto the federal and cantonal governments. The general opinion is that these should certainly continue to bear the main onus (confederation 50%, cantons 30%), but that the communes should contribute about 20% of the funds for forestry.

A certain liberality is also evident as to who should receive public funds. Only some 15% of the population feel that in future forestry in the alpine regions should take precedence. The predominant view is rather that all forest owners should receive financial aid. The suggestion that private forest owners should be specially privileged was clearly rejected. Even more generous were the responses of communal representatives: they advocate more strongly that all forest owners should be treated equally, and only some small minorities wish for preferential treatment of forest owners in the alpine regions or of public owners. Here again, the wishes of the respondent members of the general public and their communal representatives are by and large met by the actual situation, especially as far as federal and cantonal funding are concerned.

A further restricted question asked for views on the employment of public funds. One prominent feature of the responses was the low number of people who felt unable to give any answer. Another was the very strong approval of funding for forest tending and maintenance: almost 97% of the respondents classed such support as very important (c. 68%) or important (c. 29%). The proportion of answers approving measures for pest control and defence against forest damage and natural hazards was similarly high (› 85% important/very important). Incentives for the installation and maintenance of leisure amenities (73% not so important/unimportant), for the construction and maintenance of forest roads, and for guided tours or other activities for providing information (altogether › 50% not so important/unimportant) had a somewhat different rating. On the whole these responses correspond to the wishes and priorities of the public concerning activities in forestry. The picture regarding work in connection with nature conservation is different: this was rated somewhat more highly as a desired activity than as meriting public funds, for which it ranked about halfway down the scale of priorities.

One specific question asked about the desirability of compensations for setting aside forest reserves with no exploitation. About 20% of the respondents had no particular opinion about this and answered “Don’t know”, but in general the idea was rejected. Here it would be especially interesting to be able to compare these views with those of people living in the Central Plateau.

Public funding of forestry was also one topic in the ‘78 survey. At that time increases in subsidies were rejected by the majority (SASR 1979, p. 20ff). It is interesting to note that in both that survey and ours almost the same proportion (c. 60%) of the respondents felt that the level of (federal) support was appropriate. In contrast, the climate for increases seems to
be more favourable today, at least in the alpine regions, than it was twenty years ago. In general however, the questions were so different that further comparison of the results is not possible.

9 Forest policy at the communal level is hardly an issue (yet)

The facts that the greater part of the forests in the study area belong to public owners and that these therefore bear part of the responsibility for the mountain forests actuated two concrete questions about communal forest policies. The most important of these was how much the communes actually contribute towards the costs of maintenance and exploitation of the forests. The most noticeable feature of the responses is the very high proportion of people who left this question unanswered (> 45%), although simply asked for an estimate for their own commune. Astonishing was that some 1/7 of the councillors for forestry could not answer either. Of all the questions, this one produced the highest proportion of non-answers! It may be concluded that the financial situation of forest enterprises is at present probably not a burning issue at the communal level. Neither do the financial contributions of the commune towards forestry seem to be in dispute. From those estimates and figures which were given, especially by the councillors, it can further be concluded that the anticipated contributions are in some cases quite considerable - up to 3.5 million CHF per year. Some members of the general public even estimated figures as high as 12 million CHF. At the other end of the scale, some thought the sum was nil. If the estimation of expenditure of the communes would be within this modest range, it is understandable that it receives little attention. On the other hand, it would be interesting to conduct a detailed analysis of the processes and mechanisms involved in those communes in which contributions towards forestry constitute a substantial proportion of the overall budget.

The second question about communal forest policy rather concerned the future. The highly hypothetical and free question as to what they would do if they bore complete responsibility for all the forest in their commune was answered by almost 80% of the respondents. The overall wish was for intensification of current forest activities and stimulation of demands for a completely new orientation of policy. Apart from the category "intensification", only that of "economic/organisational measures" was mentioned in more than 10% of the replies. These included suggestions such as "increased efficiency" and "rationalisation" of forest enterprises. Of the activities to be intensified, 'grooming' was given outstanding priority, being named in 60% of the answers.

These results once more confirm that what the general public would like to see is a 'tidy', well-cared for, regularly regenerated forest without too many artificial amenities for leisure. As long as they have forests, in which each can enjoy nature and/or pursue recreational activities in his or her own way, they are not particularly interested in who carries out the necessary work, how it is done, or how high the costs to the commune; and as long as the federal and cantonal governments bear the major part of the costs, and the local forest services and/or enterprises maintain the forests to the satisfaction of the overwhelming majority, this attitude is perfectly understandable. In general, the answers to the concrete questions about communal forest policy and those to various other questions e.g., state of forest, satisfaction with the local forest service, amount and allocation of subsidies, activities
in the forest, moving agents in setting forest policies and their degree of engagement etc. show a high level of consistency.

10 Do the communal councils really represent the views of their electorate?

All of the questions were put to both members of the general public and to council members responsible for the forest of each commune included in the survey for the forest (president and councillor for forest). The overall impression is that the vast majority of the two groups share the same awareness of and attitudes towards forestry, forest economics, and forest politics. This was not automatically to be taken for granted, considering that every second councillor was a forest owner him- or herself, whereas among the public this was only true of every fifth representative. It has already been pointed out that in some specific cases the views of the two groups diverge significantly. This particularly applies to first the sphere economy-ecology/culture, and secondly to fields concerning matters at the institutional level.

As regards economy-ecology/culture, the impression is that the general public tends to rate the ecological and cultural aspects of the forest higher than the council members do. The latter are somewhat more conscious and in favour of the economic and wood production facets. This difference is evident in, for instance, the general awareness of the forest. The spontaneous thinking of the councillors is clearly more oriented towards instrumentalisaton: protection, recreation and wood production are those functions which most of them automatically associate with the term 'forest'. The general public, in contrast, rather thinks of ecological-cultural aspects (nature, freedom ...) and is more aware of individual components (each tree, each leaf, etc.) The responses to the question on the type and intensity of forest utilisation show a similar difference: while the council members clearly advocate intensification of forest production and are more positively inclined towards projects for expanding the infrastructure, the attitude of the general public is more reserved here. A third example concerns the protection of the forest areas. Although the clear majority of both groups finds the area of forest in their particular region just right, almost half of the councillors, who are more often directly confronted with questions regarding the clearing of forest land for other uses, consider the restrictions too stringent and would welcome greater leeway. In contrast, only every sixth member of the general public is of this view.

With regard to matters at the institutional level, two differences are particularly conspicuous. The first occurs in the assessment of the importance of groups influencing forest policies: the general public awards the nature and environmental protection organisations and their activities concerning forests significantly greater relevance than the council members do. This also confirms the premise that the population tends to be more 'green' in outlook than its political representatives. The second difference concerns the assessment of the three levels of the political body. Council members assign considerably more weight to the role of the federal government in forest politics, and are consequently more in favour of its bearing the larger part of the costs and of keeping the contributions of the communes comparatively low. This is hardly surprising, considering that they are obliged to hold annual general meetings at which they must present an account of their activities to their electorate, who may tend to judge their performance from the financial viewpoint.
11 In Conclusion

The findings from the presented survey provides interesting information about the attitudes of the alpine population towards forest, forestry and forest politics. It also reveals gaps in our knowledge, thus opening further questions for research. The answer as to what the contribution of such a study is depends on the viewpoint, function, expectations, etc. of whoever asks the question. In the opinion of the authors, the most important finding is that among terms spontaneously associated with forest, recreation and nature topped the list of the alpine population answering the questionnaire by far. Of equal importance appears the almost unanimous response that forest tending is regarded as the most important activity of forest owners. The three elements - recreation, nature, forest tending - have considerable weight in adapting and implementing public forest policies to changing social demands in the mountainous regions of Switzerland.

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